

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2552

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 5386

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SF IS

SUBJ: VISIT OF SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER TO ISRAEL

REFS: (A) TEL AVIV 2794 (B) TEL AVIV 4060

1. SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF LABOR AND MINES STEPHANUS BOTHA VISITED ISRAEL DURING THE LAST WEEK OF JULY. ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS, THE VISIT WAS SECRET AND WAS DEVOTED PRIMARILY TO DISCUSSIONS OF COMMERCIAL MATTERS INCLUDING AN INCREASE IN STEEL SALES FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND FUTURE DELIVERIES TO ISRAEL OF SOUTH AFRICAN COAL. THE COAL WILL BE REQUIRED WHEN THE FIRST UNIT OF ISRAEL'S HUGE COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT AT HADERA IS COMPLETED IN 1978. THE DISCUSSIONS ALSO REPORTEDLY COVERED INCREASED MILITARY SALES. ISRAELI MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY BAR-LEV REPORTEDLY WILL PAY A RETURN VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA LATER THIS YEAR.

2. WE DISCUSSED THE VISIT BRIEFLY WITH MFA ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL ANUG WHO WAS RATHER CAUTIOUS WITH HIS REPLIES. HE SAID THAT DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO MINISTERS HAD
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FOCUSED CHIEFLY ON ENERGY. THE INTENTION HAD NOT BEEN TO KEEP

THE VISIT SECRET BUT NEITHER HAD IT BEEN PLANNED TO GIVE IT WIDE PUBLICITY. HE SAID ISRAEL IS AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE SOUTH AFRICA COULD HAVE FOR COAL IMPORTS TO ISRAEL IN THE FUTURE. BAR-LEV WAS INVITED TO PAY A RETURN VISIT AND HE ACCEPTED, ALTHOUGH NO DATE WAS FIXED.

3. WE ALSO DISCUSSED BOTHA'S VISIT WITH THE CHARGE' AT THE SOUTH AFRICAN EMBASSY (FOUIRE), WHO WAS NOT MUCH MORE FORTHCOMING THAN ANUG. HE DID NOTE THAT BOTHA'S VISIT WAS THE RESULT OF THE AGREEMENT REACHED DURING VORSTER'S VISIT IN APRIL TO HAVE EXCHANGES AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC COOPERATION. HE STRESSED THAT BOTHA HAD COME TO ISRAEL AT THE INVITATION OF THE GOI.

4. NOTING THAT BOTHA WAS MINISTER OF LABOR AND MINES, WE ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD HAVE BEEN EMPOWERED TO DISCUSS OTHER SUBJECTS SUCH AS THE BROADER FIELDS OF TRADE, NUCLEAR MATTERS, ARMS DEALS, ETC. FOURIE SAID THAT BOTHA'S MANDATE WAS LIMITED TO MINING AND LABOR AND WHILE THIS WOULD CERTAINLY COVER DISCUSSIONS OF A COAL DEAL, IT WOULD NOT GO MUCH BEYOND THAT. WE HAVE CONFIRMED, HOWEVER, THAT BOTHA DID NOT MEET WITH LABOR MINISTER BARAM.

5. COMMENT: THE FACT THAT BOTHA'S VISIT WAS FIRST REVEALED IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER HIS RETURN THERE AND THE SUBSEQUENT CLOSE-MOUTHEDNESS OF THOSE WHO SHOULD KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT IT ARE FURTHER EVIDENCE OF THE SENSITIVITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND ALSO OF THE IMPORTANCE IT HAS FOR BOTH OF THEM. OUR FEELING IS THAT THERE IS A GOOD DEAL GOING BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SOUTH AFRICA, INCLUDING IN THE ARMS FIELD, WHICH BOTH COUNTRIES FIND IT IN THEIR INTEREST NOT TO REVEAL.
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